

INTERNET-BASED PROMOTIONAL BUSINESS MODEL

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention pertains to the general field of Internet-based models, and more
10 particularly to an Internet-based business model which utilizes promotional incentives to
induce individuals to answer questions relating to a selected topic.

BACKGROUND ART

15 One of the most revolutionary tools for conducting commerce has been the
computer. Computer based, or Computer-Assisted Commerce (e-commerce) has allowed
both merchants and consumers an unprecedented ability to access almost the entire world
easily and economically. The means by which this has been accomplished is the Internet,
via the World Wide Web (WWW). By use of the Internet, a consumer can search for
20 goods from among a large variety of sources, and a merchant can literally offer their goods
and/or services to the entire world. The Internet also provides world-wide communication
and the ability for individuals to participate in world-wide events.

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The Internet can also be used for gathering data, especially data that relates to people and their propensity to do certain things, go specific places, and/or buy particular items. As a result of the Internet's ability to quickly communicate with a large number of individuals at one time, the data collected from the Internet can be accessed, updated and sorted in a variety of categories. A major difficulty for individuals and businesses that collect data via the Internet, is enticing individuals to respond to questions. One of the most typical obstacles is that people "Don't have the time or don't want to be bothered", even when the questions can be beneficial to them. A solution to this problem would be to offer an incentive, such as an opportunity to win a prize, to those individuals who are willing to answer one or more questions. In this way the person answering the question(s) is rewarded for participating and helping, and the data collecting company is able to procure the information needed to function. A further extension of this concept would be to ask questions in an "entertaining environment", such as a game created from the questions and incentives, by use of this method the person answering the question(s) can actually enjoy it, and is likely to be willing to answer other questions in the future.

A search of the prior art did not disclose any patents that read directly on the claims of the instant invention, however the following U.S. patents are considered related:

PATENT NO.	INVENTOR	ISSUED
6,070,145	Pinsley, D., et al	30 May 2000
5,740,035	Cohen, et al	14 April 1998
5,566,291	Boulton, D., et al	15 October 1996

The 6,070,145 patent discloses a method for conducting a survey of users of an information document site located on a computer network. The method includes embedding computer program instructions into an information document located at the site, where the instructions invoke a survey program. The survey program begins when a user accesses the information document and activates the survey according to offering criteria based upon either a random or systematic participant selection. The method selects a survey participant from the users of the information document and then offers the

participant an opportunity to access the survey.

The 5,740,035 patent discloses a self-administered survey system and device. The device includes a display, an input device, a memory and a control which controls the display to show at least one survey question and control the memory to store a response to the question(s). The system utilizes a centralized survey data processor and a plurality of the self-administered survey devices for storing survey data entered by respective respondents. The survey data is wirelessly transmitted from the plurality of self-administered survey devices to the centralized survey data processor.

The 5,566,291 patent discloses a method and apparatus for implementing user feedback. A user may activate an enter feedback mode command in a computer environment to provide feedback in a feedback interface. A feedback record is created and the user's context within a product, process, service, or issue to which the feedback refers is recorded in the feedback record. Attribute icons that the user may select to identify the nature of the feedback are displayed in the feedback interface. Selected attributes, the time at which the feedback is made, the physical location and identity of the user, and comments by the user are recorded in the feedback record. A feedback visualizer for a reviewer for organizing and presenting user feedback receives the feedback from the users, the feedback is then collected and stored in a database.

For background purposes and as indicative of the art to which the invention relates, reference may be made to the following remaining patents found in the search:

<u>Patent No.</u>	<u>Inventor</u>	<u>Issue Date</u>
6,058,417	Hess, et al	2 May 2000
5,991,756	Wu	23 November 1999
5,800,269	Holch, et al	1 September 1998
5,186,463	Marin, et al	16 September 1993
4,959,783	Scott, et al	25 September 1990
4,665,502	Kreisner	12 May 1987

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

5 In its most basic design, the Internet-based, promotional business model (hereinafter "PBM") is comprised of the following elements: an Internet data center, which has means for linking worldwide computers with various data and promotional messages. The Internet data center itself is preferably comprised of a redundant, fully-meshed gigabit Ethernet network.

10 A web server is utilized to allow private or public users of the PBM to view web pages and banners corresponding to a web site selected by the user. In the basic design, a single private web server is utilized, which allows the access to be limited to authorized persons only. The web server has an input and an output, wherein the input is connected, via a first switch to the PBM. A database is connected via a second switch to the web
15 server. The database functions to store a collection of data that is used during operation of the PBM. The final element of the basic design of the PBM comprises a PBM software program, which is written to control the operation of the PBM.

The PBM is designed to function with different types of games and application surveys. The question asked in the survey can vary from one to any number and can vary,
20 depending on the subject matter and the banners selected for viewing. Additionally, the application survey can be served on multiple sites or across several computers on the Internet, a follow-up question can also be served to the same individual at a subsequent or a related site.

In view of the above disclosure, the primary object of the invention is to provide an
25 Internet-based, data collection means, which utilizes a promotional incentive to induce individuals to answer one or more questions.

Another object of the invention is to provide entertainment by means of a lotto, or other game, to Internet users.

Still another object is to offer internet users an opportunity to win cash or other prizes for answering questions and playing a game.

5 Yet another object is to allow a wide variety of data to be collected by providing questions on a large number of subjects/topics.

Another object is to ask the questions in a survey manner, which can be utilized by companies to determine commercial trends.

10 Still another object is to provide a service by which individuals or businesses can create a personalized survey for any particular/pertinent need.

Another object of the invention is to provide management and central control of the data collected.

15 Yet another object of the invention is to create a database for Internet users and their individual buying practices, past or future purchases and personal likes and dislikes.

A final object of the invention is to be able to provide businesses with the names and/or e-mail addresses of potential customers based on the information garnered by the surveys/questions.

20 These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the subsequent detailed description of the preferred embodiment and the appended claims taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

25 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 is a block diagram of the basic design for the Internet-based promotional business model (PBM).

FIGURE 2 is a block diagram of an enhanced PBM design.

FIGURE 3A and 3B is a block diagram of a PBM utilizing redundant elements.

FIGURE 4A is a software diagram of a real-time marketing offer based on a
 5 survey response wherein the offer is sent to a user via an e-mail.

FIGURE 4B is a software diagram of a real-time marketing offer based on a survey
 response wherein the user is shown a pop-up.

FIGURE 4C is a software diagram of a real-time marketing offer based on a
 10 survey response wherein the user is shown a flash/HTML

FIGURE 4D is a software diagram of a real-time marketing offer based on a
 survey response wherein the user is shown a banner.

FIGURE 4E is a software diagram of a sequential drill-down group survey.

15 FIGURE 4F is a software diagram of a sequential general non-group survey.

FIGURE 4G is a software diagram of a non-sequential drill-down group survey.

FIGURE 5 is a display of an IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page.

FIGURE 6A is also a display of an IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page.

20 FIGURE 6B is a display of several advertising banners pertaining to a category
 chosen in FIGURE 6A.

FIGURE 6C is a display of the lotto numbers selected, an indication of the numbers
 have won a prize and the advertiser's splash page.

FIGURE 6D is a display of an IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page with a set of lotto
 numbers, a quick-pick option and a question.

25 FIGURE 7A is a display of a first set of lotto numbers, a quick-pick option and a
 list of survey category banners.

FIGURE 7B is a display a second set of lotto numbers, a quick-pick option and a
 first refinement category.

FIGURE 7C is a display of a third set of lotto numbers, a quick-pick option and a second refinement category.

FIGURE 7D is a display of the home page pertaining to the second refinement category.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The best mode for carrying out the Internet-based promotional business model, (hereinafter "PBM 10"), is presented in terms of a preferred embodiment which is disclosed as a basic serial design, an enhanced serial design and a redundant design. All PBM designs are controlled and operated by a PBM software program.

The basic serial design of the PBM, as shown in FIGURE 1, is comprised of six major elements: an Internet data center 12, a first switch 14, a web server 22, a second switch 16, a database 34 and a PBM software program 110.

The Internet data center 12 includes means for linking worldwide computers with various data and promotional messages. The Internet utilized for the PBM is comprised of a redundant, fully-meshed gigabit Ethernet network.

The first web server 24, as shown in FIGURE 1, is connected to the Internet data center 12 via the first switch 14 and to the database 34 via the second switch 34. The first web server 24 allows both private and public users of the PBM 10 to view web pages corresponding to a web site selected by the user. The database 34 stores a collection of data used in operating the PBM 10.

The PBM software program 110 can be written in various languages including Structured Query Language (SQL) which allows large databases to be easily manipulated; Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) which allows a set of codes to be inserted into text files to indicate special typefaces, images and links to other hypertext documents; JavaScript which allows a web page to include commands to be executed by the web server; Java which allows networked computers to transmit computations as well as data to each other; C++ which is an object-oriented programming language; and VBScript

which allows the addition of executable commands to a web page using a language based on Visual BASIC.

The enhanced serial design of the PBM, as shown in FIGURE 2, is comprised of the following major elements: an Internet data center 12, a first switch 14, a second switch 16, a third switch 18, a first web server 24, a second web server 26, a first database 36, a second database 38, a database storage 40, a web data storage 42, a first router 46, a first firewall 54, a remote corporate site 47 consisting of a second router 48 and a second firewall 56, a third router 50, and a PBM software program 110.

The Internet data center has the means for linking worldwide computers with various data and promotional messages. The first router 46 has an input and an output, with the input connected to the Internet data center 12. The first router 46 provides users with controlled access to incoming data packets from the Internet data center 12.

The first firewall 54, as shown in FIGURE 2, has an input and an output. The input is connected, via a first switch 14, to the output of the first router 46. The output of the first firewall 54 is connected, via a second switch 16, to the inputs of the first web server 24 and the second web server 26. The first web server 24 allows private or public users of the PBM 10 to view web pages corresponding to a web site selected by the user. The second web server 26 is connected in parallel which allows redundant operation and additional traffic. The inputs to the first and second web servers 24,26 are connected, via the second switch 16 to the output of the first firewall 54. The first firewall 54 is designed to relay only data packets which are intended and authorized to reach the first and second web servers 24,26.

The first database 36 in a preferred architecture operates in a cluster with the second database 38 as shown in FIGURE 2. The first and second inputs of the first and second databases 36,38 are connected, via a third switch 18, to the outputs of the first and second web servers 24,26. Both of the servers function by storing a collection of data

required to operate the PBM 10. To complete a database cluster, a database storage 40 is connected to the first and second databases 36,38.

5 The second design can also be operated with the web data storage 42 that is connected, via the third switch 18 to the first and second web servers 24,26. The web data storage 42 allows web pages and images to be stored off the web server, thus increasing their utility and performance.

10 To further enhance the utility of the second design, the remote corporate site 47 can be included. The site 47 includes the second firewall 56 which is connected to the second router 48. The second router 48 is connected via a telephone line or an RF data link to the third router 50 which, in turn, is connected to the third switch 18.

15 The final element of the second design is the PBM software program which can be prepared in various formats and languages as described supra.

The redundant design of the PBM 10, as shown in FIGURES 3A and 3B is comprised of the following major elements: a subnet A, a subnet B, a subnet C, a subnet D and a subnet E.

20 The subnet B consists of a first switch 66 and a redundant second switch 67. One side of the first and second switches are connected respectively to a first firewall 68 and a redundant second firewall 69, followed and connected respectively by a first cache server 70 and a redundant second cache server 71. The two cache servers 70,71 are connected
25 respectively through a second switch 72 and a redundant third switch 73 to a first router 74 and a redundant second router 75 from where the routers are connected to the subnetA which is comprised of a redundant Internet data center 62 as shown in FIGURE 3B.

The subnet C, as shown in FIGURE 3A, consists of a first load balancer 76 and a redundant second load balancer 77. The two load balancers are connected to subnet B via the first and second switches 66,67. The two load balancers 76,77 are also connected to a web server farm 78 and to a mail server farm 79 via a fourth switch 80 and a redundant fifth switch 81. The two switches 80,81 can connect the web and mail servers 78,79 either inline with the load balancers or reverse the connections to the load balancers 76,77.

The subnet D consists of a sixth switch 82 and a redundant seventh switch 83. One side of the switches connects the subnet D to the subnet C and the other side of the switches are connected to a web/E mail mass data storage 84. Either of the two switches 82,83 can be used to control the operation of the web/E mail mass data storage.

The subnet E consists of a clustered database farm controlled by either the sixth switch 82 or the seventh switch 83. Connected to the clustered database farm 86 is a fiber-channel mass data storage 88.

The function of the subnets A-E is to separate the various elements of the architecture into publically accessible and privately accessible elements.

The redundant design of the PBM 10 is also designed to incorporate a remote private or corporate site 47, which includes a third firewall 92 connected to a third router 94. The third router 92 is connected via a telephone line or an RF data link to a fourth router 96 which is connected to subnet D via the seventh switch 83.

The final structural element applicable to all the PBM 10 designs is the PBM software program, which is comprised of the following passive and interactive modules:

- a) a real-time marketing offer based on a survey response, wherein the offer is sent as an e-mail to the user,
- 5 b) a real-time marketing offer based on a survey response, wherein the offer is sent to the user via a first pop-up,
- c) a real-time marketing offer based on a survey response, wherein the offer is sent to the user via a flash/HTML,
- 10 d) a real-time marketing offer based on a survey response, wherein the offer is sent to the user via a banner,
- e) a first survey procedure utilizing a sequential, drill-down group survey,
- f) a second survey procedure utilizing a sequential, general non-group survey and
- g) a third survey procedure utilizing a non-sequential drill-down group survey.

The operation of the PBM 10 is disclosed in two operating modes. In the first operating mode the user logs onto a web site which can be a game site or other inducement/entertainment site. For the purpose of disclosure, the web site will consist of a web page entitled "IMUSTLOTTO.COM", as shown in FIGURE 5, which provides an incentive for participating in a survey, in that a person may select one or more lotto numbers for a chance to win a prize, which is typically money or merchandise, but can be anything of value.

In the first mode, three web pages are sequentially displayed as shown in FIGURES 6A-6C. To commence the operation of the first mode, as shown in FIGURE 6A-6C, the following steps are performed:

1. Log onto the IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page, as shown in FIGURE 6A. and 6D. The web page contains space for entering lotto numbers which may be chosen or "quick-picked" by the computer, and a list of category banners.
2. Select and key-in a set of lotto numbers or select the "quick pick" option as also shown in FIGURES 6A and 6D.

3. Select a single category banner (Example: HOTELS). After the lotto numbers or the “quick pick” and the category banner are selected, a second window appears, as shown in FIGURE 6B, that displays several advertising banners pertaining to the category banner selected in step 3.

4. Select a particular advertising banner (Example: VENETIAN). After an advertising banner is selected, a third window appears, as shown in FIGURE 6C, that displays:

- the lotto numbers selected and indicates if the numbers have won a prize, or the time remaining until the game ends
- the advertisers “splash page” showing the details of the advertising banner selected in step 4.

5. Review the contents of the splash page. At this point the participant can log off or continue to a second sequence by clicking a replay button, which allows the PBM software program to return to the IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page where the participant can commence a new sequence of numbers and banners. The number of times a participant can re-enter the IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page is determined by a selection routine embedded in the software program.

In the second operating mode the user logs onto a web page which can consist of any gaming side or other player inducement web page. For the purpose of disclosure, the web page for the second model is also entitled “IMUSTLOTTO.COM” which provides an incentive for the participant in that several lotto games can be selected to potentially win a prize.

In the second mode, four web pages are sequentially displayed as shown in FIGURES 7A-7D. To commence the second mode of operation, the following steps are performed:

1. Log onto the IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page as shown in FIGURES 5 and 7A. The web page contains numbers which may be chosen, or "quick-picked" by the computer, and a list of survey category banners.
2. Select and key-in a set of lotto numbers or select the "quick pick" option.
3. Select a single category banner (Example: VEHICLES). After the lotto numbers or the "quick pick", and the single category banner are selected, a second window appears, as shown in FIGURE 7B, that has space for entering a second set of lotto numbers or a "quick pick", and a list of first refinement categories pertaining to the survey category banner selected in step 3.
4. Select a second set of lotto numbers or a "quick pick", and a first refinement category banner, as shown in FIGURE 7B (Example: LUXURY). After the second set of lotto numbers or the "quick pick", and the first refinement category are selected, a third window appears, as shown in FIGURE 7C, that has space for entering a third set of lotto numbers or a "quick pick", and a list of second refinement categories pertaining to the first refinement category selected in step 4.
5. Select a third set of lotto numbers or a "quick pick", and a second refinement category banner as shown in FIGURE 7C (Example: LEXUS). At this point the participant is notified if any of the lotto numbers selected have won their respective game. After the third set of lotto numbers or the third "quick pick", and the second refinement category are selected, the home page pertaining to the second

refinement category appears which provides data for the various models produced by the company in this example: LEXUS.

- 5 6. Review the contents of the home page. At this point, the participant can log off or continue to a second sequence by clicking a replay button, which causes the software program to return to the IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page where the participant can commence a new sequence. The number of times a participant can re-enter the IMUSTLOTTO.COM web page is determined by a selection routine embedded in the software program.

10 While the invention has been described in complete detail and pictorially shown in the accompanying drawings, it is not to be limited to such details, since many changes and modifications may be made in the invention without departing from the spirit and scope thereof. For example, the disclosure is presented in terms of a lotto site, however, the program can also be used with various other gaming sites or other types of sites. Also, the "banner" referred to in the disclosure refers to any type of HTML link. Hence, it is described to cover any and all modifications and forms which may come within the language and scope of the appended claims.